

# Ystrad Mynach: 'Overdeveloped' town could lose last sports field

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A town may lose one of its last playing fields if plans for a school expansion go ahead, it has been warned.

Caerphilly council is consulting on plans to expand Trinity Fields School in Ystrad Mynach, which would see Penallta RFC lose its main pitch.

Club committee members say they are not opposed to the school but have not been given a viable alternative which would allow its 450 children to keep playing.

The council said the expansion was urgently needed to satisfy demand.

The plans for the school, which provides for children with special educational needs, include a new building extension and outdoor play space.

The council has said it hopes to complete the works by September 2023.

But the plans are the latest in a long line of decisions which have left the community with the prospect of having no quality playing fields for competitive sport, according to Matthew Tucker, former Penallta RFC player and coach.

Mr Tucker, whose father and grandfather also played for the club, said large developments in the past 20 years, including the police station and hospital, have seen the last of the town's football and cricket clubs fold.

"The last development resulted in us moving here in 2007, and again we find ourselves in the situation where we could potentially lose another field," he added.

In its consultation document, the council said it would "look to mitigate the loss" of the pitch by "enhancing provision within walking distance" of the club and "the enhancement of two existing school sites".

The council's preferred option is to make improvements to a pitch at Sue Noake Leisure Centre and provide two other pitches at Trinity Fields.

But the club, which plays in the WRU League 1 East, say the Sue Noake pitch is a walk of more than half a mile (1km) from the club-house and would displace children already using it for junior sports.

The other pitches at Trinity Fields are of poor quality and often flood, Mr Tucker said.

"Long-term, you have to question the sustainability of the club," he said, explaining that bar sales were a big source of income and would be expected to drop significantly under the council's plans.

Local councillor Martyn James, who has lived in Ystrad Mynach for over 40 years, said the village had seen "far too much development".

"Since 2007 we have lost two football fields, two small rugby fields, a large rugby field and a cricket pitch," he said.

"To take the only sports field away now, I think it's deplorable - it's terrible."

Mr James said the coronavirus pandemic had put a strain on families with children who would have usually been playing regular sport.

He added: "If the club goes you will see the demise of grassroots rugby here and you'll see a lot more children walking the streets."

A council spokesman said the project was a "multi-million pound planned extension of a flagship special school which looks after some of the most vulnerable and severely disabled children in the community".

He reiterated that the council owns the pitch and hires it to the club, adding there were "numerous other facilities in the nearby vicinity".